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Historicizing Child Wage Exploitation in Nigeria

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Historicizing Child Wage Exploitation in Nigeria

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Dedication

To Obioma, my dear wife,

for her love and undying support.

And to

Oluomachukwu, our daughter, who arrived three months before I was awarded this degree,

for the joy she brought into our lives and family.

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My academic journey has been marked with a continuously growing store of indebtedness. With the opportunity that this report offers, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to the following persons who were particularly helpful in researching and preparing this work. My supervisor, Prof. Toyin Falola, played a key role in my decision to research labor history in Nigeria, this report is only the first fruit of a journey that is just about to begin. After preparing the first part of this report, Prof. Falola and Dr. Adeshina Afolayan of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, offered useful comments and suggested ways I could broaden my research. I am grateful to Prof. James Denbow for accepting to serve as the second reader on my committee and for his thorough reading of this report.

Without the kind support of Prof Dr. Egodi Uchendu and her husband, Prof. Chukwuka Uchendu, my coming to graduate school at UT Austin may never have materialized. They have made a lot of sacrifices in helping me get to where I am presently. The seeds they have continued to sow into my life will live with me for a life time. The staff at the Perry Castaneda Library, The University of Texas at Austin, assisted me in sourcing the primary sources for my research. The need to rethink my dissertation research topic became obvious after my trip to Nigeria in the Summer of 2016. That trip was sponsored by the generous fellowship of the History Department, The University of Texas at Austin. Although that preliminary research was meant to investigate dress cultures and textile markets in Nigeria, the outcome of that trip made it clear that I needed to change my research focus. Without the generous fellowship by the History Department, this may have taken longer for me to know.

My wife, Obioma, who was pregnant with our daughter at the time I was writing parts of this report, managed well without me and condoned my constant absences from home. Oluomachukwu was on hand to provide pleasant distractions while I was proofreading this report.

ABSTRACT

Historicizing Child Wage Exploitation in Nigeria

By

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2017

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Agbo's focus in this report is three-fold—to challenge the use of western concept of child labor in defining child work/labor in Africa, to highlight the colonial origin of child wage exploitation in Nigeria, and to examine the pervasiveness of child wage exploitation in Nigeria since the dawn of the twenty-first century. He argues that child labor in African culture differs from the western interpretation of child labor, defined as using children to make money, especially in often hazardous work environments and conditions. Agbo privileges the idea of child labor based on African cultural ideas, which sees child labor as work (domestic or otherwise), socially reserved for children as a social instrument of child training, social integration/socialization, and preparation for adult life. Using children to make money referred to in this report as child wage exploitation, in Nigeria, has its origin in the exploitive economic policies of the colonial government. Agbo argues that these policies forced child

labor out of its socio-cultural boundaries, by drafting children into exploitive work environments. Prominent among these policies were; the Native House Rule Ordinance and the Roads and Creeks Proclamation of 1901 and 1903, respectively, which made labor for public purpose compulsory for all men from fifteen to fifty-five years old. To meet the demands imposed by these laws as well as social and individual/family responsibilities, the peoples of Nigeria pushed child labor beyond child education to income generation, a situation that has continued into the twenty-first century. Poverty, harsh economic condition of the country, and corruption, among other issues, are major reasons for the persistence of child wage exploitation in Nigeria. And, until these issues are tackled, the hope of a society free of commercial child workers may never be realized.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

“Never in the history of our world has children been under the kind of siege and abuse they are today”.¹

Every society claims to be pursuing the best interest of its children. Thus, child training in different societies usually conform to the culture, religious beliefs, practices, and values of the society in which a child is raised. Conversely, it is puzzling to see that in contrast to the much-claimed pursuit of the best interest of children, children have at different times in history been victims of abuses, injustices, neglects, and unwarranted denials. Unfair practices against children are not particularly peculiar to any geographical or cultural location. World societies at different points in history engaged in one form of child “abuse” or the other. Regarding the pervasiveness of unfair child practices, Ibanga notes that the term, child labor, was first used in Great Britain during the Industrial Revolution, which was characterized by using cheap child laborers in exploitative factory working conditions. To save children from exploitative working environments and secure adult working positions, children were required to stay longer in school.²

¹ http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Under_Siege_March_2014.pdf

² Francis Imeobong Ibanga, “Child Labor in Nigeria: A Religious Educational Response”, PhD dissertation, Fordham University, 2007, 41-42. See also, V. Zelier, *Pricing the Priceless Child*, New York: Basic Books, 1985 and United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) 2005 report on child labor titled “Child Labor Today—End Child Exploitation U.K.”.

Examining “child labor”³ in the light of the continuous increase in the number of children not enrolled in western schools, Aramide Kazeem notes that in 2004, the highest number of working children who participated in some form of economic work lived in the Asia Pacific region of the developing world. Sub-Saharan Africa came second, followed by Latin America and the Caribbean. He further notes that sub-Saharan Africa had the highest absolute number of working children, and the likelihood that children would participate in work was higher in the region than elsewhere in the developing world. Specifically, one in every four children who lived in sub-Saharan Africa was expected to engage in some form of work before the age of eighteen.⁴

Furthermore, abusive child practices were also a problem in the United States. According to Ibanga, a Human Rights Watch report in 2000 reveals that all types of “child labor” also existed in the United States, especially on farms in the west, where child laborers worked under dangerous and cruel conditions. These child workers, aged thirteen to sixteen years, worked as many as seventy to eighty hours a week. They lacked adequate drinking water, toilet and hand-washing facilities, which resulted in bacterial infections, dehydration, and heat illness. They were exposed to dangerous pesticides and suffered rashes, headaches, dizziness, nausea, and vomiting. The long-term consequence of pesticide poisoning included

³ The conceptual and contextual operationalization of basic and recurrent terminologies used in this chapter is dealt with in the next chapter.

⁴ Aramide Kazeem, “Examining Children’s Wellbeing: Schooling and Child Labor in Nigeria”, PhD dissertation, The Pennsylvania State University, 2010, 3. See also, A. Admassie, “Explaining the High Incidence of Child Labor in Sub-Saharan Africa”, *African Development Review* 14, no 2, 251-275, and F. Hegemann, Y. Diallo, A. Etienne, and F. Mehran, “Global Child Labor Trends, 2000-2004”, International Labor Organization May 14, 2008 http://www.ilo.org/dyn/declaris/DECLARATIONWEB.DOWNLOAD_BLOB?Var_DocumentID=6233

cancer, brain damage, and learning and memory problems.⁵ Quoting Greene and Levine, Ibanga further notes: “historically, child labor was accepted in the U.S. because... working children kept parents from becoming dependent on public charity”.⁶

Levine exposes “the widespread employment of children in sweatshops, establishments that violate fair labor law and occupational health and safety standards... These youngsters suffered amputations, burns, deep cuts, and electrocutions. Several of them are killed every year; others worked late on school nights in violation of state and federal laws and consequently sometimes fell asleep in class”.⁷ Ibanga adds that: children made up the majority of the agricultural workforce around the world, and sometimes worked in groups with other children. Thousands of Mexican children migrated with their families to work in the fields of California every year. Other children worked on farms in India, Brazil, Argentina, and South Africa. They worked as hotel waiters, bellboys and chambermaids. They worked in glass factories and mines. They baked bread, made shoes, served and cleaned in restaurants and gas stations, and built toys in Italy and China. Children also rolled cigarettes and worked in leather shops. In India, Pakistan, and Morocco, children weaved carpets and Turkish children (nine to ten years old) worked in Germany. Children sew, sold, pound, carried and cleaned. Almost everywhere, children were involved in street trades: cleaning shoes, guarding cars, selling newspapers, magazines and flowers, to name a few. Some were drug carriers, and

⁵ Ibanga, “Child Labor in Nigeria: A Religious Educational Response”, 48. See also, Human rights watch. Abusive child labor found in U.S. agriculture-U.S. law discriminates against child farmworkers. http://hrw.org/english/docs/2000/06/20/usdom580_txt.htm

⁶ Ibanga, 48, and L. Greene, *Child Labor: Then and Now*, New York: Franklin Watts, 1992.

⁷ M. J. Levine, *Children for Hire: The Perils of Child Labor in the United States*, Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2003 in Ibanga, 48-49.

others worked as prostitutes in countries including Holland, France, and Germany... Children were forced to race camels in the Middle East, weaved carpets in India and filled brothels all over the developing world. Many children worked as soldiers.⁸

From the above instances, a number of issues are identifiable: first, unfair child practices (which I examine in this paper as child wage exploitation) was and has continued to be a global phenomenon. Therefore, the current emphasis (especially by developed economies) on developing countries as the only place where child wage laborers could be found is misleading. The difference lies in the prevalence of different social structures. For instance, because Nigeria is largely an informal economy, the presence of child wage laborers is easily noticeable when compared to the United States, which operates a more organized and enclosed market system. While child wage laborers could be easily seen on Nigerian streets and market places, in the U.S. and other developed economies, child wage laborers mostly worked behind closed doors in the different establishments already cited above.

Secondly, social and economic factors commonly shaped the interaction between societies (in this case, grown-up adults) and their children. The social circumstances refer to societal norms and values and their role in determining the kind of training its children received. Economic factors on the other hand, focus on the standard of living in different societies and also the amount of wealth available to individuals in the society and a desire to create more wealth either for the purpose of overcoming poverty or the quest for more and more wealth. A third implication of the above analysis shows that child wage exploitation also

⁸ Ibanga, 49, *New York Times*, October 29 2006, 1, 16-17, and Greene, 1992.

has an urban component to it. The commercialization of the labor of children was a critical manifestation of urban development in Nigeria. While child wage exploitation was widespread all over Nigeria, its prevalence was more characteristic of Nigeria's urban cities than was the case in the rural and semi-urban communities. As cities expand into vibrant urban centers, the percentage of child wage exploitation also grew. It was even worse in commercial centers like Lagos, Onitsha, and Kano, among others. Children in these urban centers became significant and in some cases, indispensable source of labor and income for the sustenance and continued growth of the urban economy. As shown in this study and other supporting studies, the exploitative economic policies of the British colonial government in Nigeria laid the foundation for child wage exploitation in Nigeria, as well as her other African colonies. Chapter three examines colonial economic policies and its connection to child wage exploitation in Nigeria.

Since the dawn of the twenty-first century, abusive practices against children have taken new shapes and forms and have continued to increase. These include: child trafficking, rape, child marriage, and child wage exploitation (otherwise popularly referred to as child labor), among others. A United Nations study of violence against children reveals that about 40,000,000 children are abused every year, 150,000,000 girls and 73,000,000, boys experience sexual violence; 1,800,000 are forced into commercial sexual exploitation while 1,200,000 are victims of trafficking.⁹ Similar studies have shown that Asia, Latin America and Africa have the highest number of cases of children experiencing wage exploitation. This

⁹ "Maina: Advocating Child Right on Sexual Abuse" Daily Independent Newspaper. See <http://dailyindependentnig.com/2014/04/maina-advocating-child-rights-sexual-abuse/>

study is an attempt to, first, place child labor and child wage exploitation in Africa in the right historical perspective in the African context. Secondly, the study examines the origin of child wage exploitation in Nigeria. Lastly, this study is an attempt to historicize child wage exploitation and other abusive child practices in Nigeria since its beginning in the colonial era to the twenty-first century. The central arguments of this study are that a proper understanding of child wage exploitation in Africa requires that the phenomenon be examined from an African epistemological standpoint and, that while child labor or work existed in pre-colonial Nigeria, child wage exploitation has its root in the exploitative economic policies of the colonial government.

To understand child wage exploitation, this study delineates between the African understanding and practice of child labor as a means of child training, socialization, and preparation for adulthood, and the current practice of using children to make money. It argues that colonial policies, urbanization and the economic realities in Nigeria and the developing world generally made the participation of children in economic activities inevitable. The goal of the first part of the study is predicated on Santos' assertion that "the understanding of the world by far exceeds the western understanding of the world and to show that the emancipatory transformations in the world may follow grammars and scripts other than those developed by the western-centric critical theory, and such diversity should be valorized".¹⁰ The second section of the paper examines colonial foundation of child wage exploitation in Nigeria. The remainder of the study considers the pervasiveness of child wage

¹⁰ Boaventura De Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide*, London: Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2014.

exploitation in Nigeria since the dawn of the twenty-first century, the reasons for the continued persistence of the anomaly, and the connection between child wage exploitation and societal violence and insecurity.

The primary sources for this study are Nigerian (and a few non-Nigerian) newspapers mostly published in the last fifteen years (2000-2015), oral interviews, and archival records on colonial policies. A collection of over three hundred newspaper articles sourced through The University of Texas at Austin libraries databases reveal that the major cause of child wage exploitation in the developing world was poverty. Other contributors were lack of government commitment to eradicating child wage exploitation, religious beliefs and practices, culture, public sector corruption, greed and wickedness. This study also draws from secondary sources—PhD dissertations, journal articles, books, and periodic publications and survey/research reports of various international organizations, government ministries, departments and agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

A salient outcome of this study reveals that historians have not given adequate attention to the study of child wage exploitation, as much of the existing literatures on the subject are social science based. Hence, these literatures lack a proper understanding of different peoples of the world and their interpretation of what could be regarded as child wage exploitation. Thus, historicizing child wage exploitation in Nigeria becomes a crucial addition not only to the existing literature but also to the understanding of the concept itself.

CHAPTER TWO

THE IDEOLOGY OF CHILD LABOR IN TRADITIONAL AFRICAN CULTURE:

CONCEPTUAL/CONTEXTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Nigeria's Child Rights Act (2003) defines a child as a person under eighteen years of age.¹¹ The Children and Young Persons Act of Eastern, Western and Northern regions of Nigeria (section 2) states that a child is a person below fourteen years while a young person is a person who has attained the age of fourteen years but is below seventeen years.¹² Furthermore, Nigeria's Immigration Act states that any person below sixteen years is a minor. For the Matrimonial Causes Act (1970), the age of maturity is twenty-one. The United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child also sees anyone below sixteen years as a child. One recurring decimal in the above definitions is the fact that age is used as a yardstick for distinguishing between adults and children. The Penal Code of Northern Nigeria (section 50) portrays this better: no act is an offence which is done by a child under seven years of age, or by a child above seven years but less than twelve years of age, who has not attained sufficient maturity or understanding to judge the nature and consequence of such act.¹³

The above definitions presuppose that childhood is regarded as the age of innocence; for it takes understanding to distinguish between good and bad. Thus, one is regarded as a child when, based on his/her age, he/she is yet to develop the full mental capacity that enables

¹¹ Federal Republic of Nigeria, Child Rights Act, (2003). See also, Owasanoye and Adekunle, "Overview of the Rights of the Child in Nigeria" in Ayua and Okague (Eds.) *The Rights of the Child in Nigeria*, Lagos: Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies, 1996.

¹² Olayinka S. Akinwumi, "Legal Impediments on the Practical Implementation of the Child Rights Act 2003", *International Journal of Legal Information*, 2009, 37, no 3, 387.

¹³ Penal Code, Northern Nigeria (section 50).

him/her to understand the full import of his/her actions. Because childhood is the early stage of human development, one would suppose that it should be characterized by love, protection, and special care for the growing child. But the experiences of Nigerian children since the colonial times present a sharp contrast to the above expectation of what childhood ought to be. For instance, Northern Nigeria was reported to have the highest rate of child abuse, ranging from rape, early marriage, and, child wage exploitation, among others. On Tuesday, November 17, 2015, the Kano State Police Command, in Northern Nigeria announced the arrest of fifty-seven men involved in the rape of children aged two to seven. On June 8, 2015, the wife of a former Vice President of Nigeria, and founder of Women Trafficking and Child Labor Eradication Foundation (WOTCLEF), Mrs Titi Abubakar, reported that northern Nigeria had the highest rate of child marriage in the country¹⁴. She further traced the high incidence of child marriage in northern Nigeria to the belief that child marriage would reduce promiscuity. According to Mrs Abubakar, child marriage advocates argue that it was necessary for preserving girls' virginity. She decried the health risks virgin girls are exposed to¹⁵.

Married adolescents in northern Nigeria faced greater reproductive health risks than their unmarried counterparts due to low education, low status, and large spousal gaps. They have little or no inter-spousal communication, limited access to contraceptives and the risks of HIV infections from husbands who have multiple sexual partners.¹⁶ The recently contracted marriages between fifty-four year old former Central Bank of Nigeria governor and incumbent

¹⁴ "North has Highest Rate of Early Marriage in Nigeria", *Leadership*, June 8, 2015.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Emir of Kano in Northern Nigeria, Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, and eighteen year old Sa'adatu Barkindo-Musdafa, and also between seventy-seven year old Alaafin of Oyo, Oba Lamidi Adeyemi III, and sixteen-year old Ayaba Badirat, in Southwestern Nigeria, both confirm Mrs Abubakar's testimony.¹⁷ As exemplified in these two marriages, the peculiar case of child wage exploitation in Northern Nigeria in particular, stems from obnoxious cultural and religious practices. This is examined in detail below. As part of efforts to keep Nigerian children from being abused, the Federal Government enacted a number of laws and also established a National Joint Task Force for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse and Violence against Children among others, with the objective of addressing the growing spate of violence against children¹⁸. Nevertheless, child wage exploitation persisted.

Before proceeding to discuss the different forms child wage exploitation has taken in Nigeria since its beginning in the colonial era to the twenty-first century, it is important to understand the cultural dimension of child work (or child labor) in Africa *vis a vis* child wage exploitation. Given the increasing misinterpretation of child work as child exploitation, this clarification is very necessary. Also, it is important to place the assistance children offer to their parents in their various businesses as a result of the current economic realities in the country in the right perspective.

¹⁷ For Sanusi's marriage see, "Emir Sanusi secretly Marries Adamawa Princess", *Premium Times Newspaper*, September 26, 2015, <http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/190644-emir-sanusi-secretly-marries-adamawa-princess.html>. See also <http://naijagists.com/photos-alaafin-of-oyos-youngestteenage-wife-badirat-adeyemi-glams-in-iposhlooks/> for Oba Adeyemi's marriage.

¹⁸ "Maina: Advocating Child Rights on Sexual Abuse", *Daily Independent*, April 22, 2014.

The state of Nigeria's economy has made it almost inevitable for parents to engage their children in the family business as a way of increasing family income. This is not to suggest that this study encourages child trade in any way. But understanding the realities of the Nigerian economy is pertinent to understanding the persistence and prevalence of child wage exploitation. This study insists that any genuine analysis of child wage exploitation in Nigeria requires, first and foremost, a serious and sincere attention to the economy and the general wellbeing of Nigerians. As long as Nigeria's economy remains in its present sorry state, as long as corruption prevails in government, as long as Africa continues to see itself with the mirror of the capitalist west, child wage exploitation and underdevelopment shall prevail and all measures against child wage exploitation would continue to meet with frustration.

Children in most Nigerian culture groups were (and are still) seen as belonging to the entire community. Therefore, it was believed that the upbringing of a child was not the parents' duties alone. In as much as the bulk of the job of training children lay with the parents, the community also played leading roles in that upbringing. In line with this belief, a common proverb among the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria say; "nwa bu nwa oha" (a child is everybody's child). A similar Yoruba proverb says "eni kan ni o mbibo gbogbo ara ni o nto" (the birthing process may be an individual task but the child's upbringing is a communal responsibility)¹⁹. Traditional African communities, therefore, had laid down principles or social values expected

¹⁹ Egodi Uchendu's interview with Dr. Bolaji Bateye, Lecturer, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State Nigeria, 2004, cited in, Egodi Uchendu, "Historical Patterns of Child Treatment in Nigeria: A Perspective", *Benue Valley Journal of Humanities*, vol. 9, Nos. 1 and 2, (2009), 4.

to guide the training of its children and which they must imbibe in the process of growing up and get acculturated in.

These societal expectations have greatly influenced the standards set by each family that belongs to that society. Hence, while there were social responsibilities (labor/work) reserved for children of various age groups at the community level, families also allocated responsibilities to their children based on what was considered appropriate for their age. Discussing child socialization among Nigeria's diverse ethnic groups, Egodi Uchendu records that; "child socialization—the process of integrating a child within its community and acquainting it with the social norms—commenced from the time the baby was weaned. Thus, children were made aware of their society and how to behave within the limits of its norms. Socialization was a process that combined moral instruction with some degree of child work"²⁰.

At the community level children between four and seven years were expected to join in sweeping public places like the village square, shrines, etc. Girls participated in the cleaning of market places. Teenage boys joined in the much harder responsibilities like clearing bushes and drainages while older children participated in road construction, rotational farming and community security, among others. At the family level, it was the responsibility of children to fetch water, firewood, wash dishes, and take care of the younger siblings in the absence of their parents. When a girl child begins to grow into puberty, it was expected that she would

²⁰*Ibid.*

learn cooking, housekeeping, and other skills necessary for being a good wife from her mother.

Phoebe Ottenberg and Uchendu give a more clearly outlined labor distribution for children of various ages. Ottenberg notes that “between the ages of five and six, boys ran errands for their parents and older members of the extended family while girls of similar age cared for younger children. For both sexes, training for adult tasks began at the age of eight from which time boys helped their father in the farm and girls helped their mother with the house work and farming²¹. “By early adolescent”, Uchendu records, “a girl was expected to assume much of the housework from her mother. At this stage, girls did more domestic work besides farming while boys concentrated largely on manual work”²². Labor distribution was basically the same for children across most if not all of Nigeria’s ethnic groups.

With the changing times and the consequent change in societal customs, taste, and expectations, the duties of children remained basically the same with only slight changes. It is important to note that African societies saw child labor as a training process and more importantly, as instrument of socialization, and preparation for adult life. The expectation was that child work would inculcate social values into the child and prepare him/her for productive adulthood. The inculcation of social norms and values was also important for the preservation of the cultural identity and the peoples’ several other heritage.

²¹ Phoebe Ottenberg, “The Afikpo Ibo of Eastern Nigeria”, in J. R. Gibbs (ed.) *Peoples of Africa*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965, 23.

²² Uchendu, “Historical Patterns of Child Treatment”, 5.

Another important point to note is that child work in the African context was also a tool for educating children. Several literatures on child wage exploitation claim that it disrupts the education of the child. While this may not be entirely wrong, the missing link here is that these literatures only see education as western enlightenment. Pre-literate African society was not static. Among its various activities and measures to understand and conquer its environment were indigenous means of child education. The child work measured according to what the community believed he/she could be able to undertake given his level of development, therefore, formed part of educative tools for raising children. The major undoing of such literatures is their interpretation of the African world from western and capitalist perspective.

This study argues that a proper understanding of Africa requires studying the people from their own worldview. While African societies believed in the protection of the child, they also considered the integration of the child early enough in the life of the society as equally important. As stated earlier, the argument for an inside out understanding of the African worldview in discussing child wage exploitation does not mean support for child abuse. On the contrary, the argument here is that the structure of African societies required children to take part in certain tasks germane for their overall development. This was driven by a desire to ensure a secure future for both the society and its children. According to Uchendu, “gradual exposure to work was part of the childhood activities in most parts of the country. Work thus served as an avenue for educating children and keeping them occupied at a time when western education was not universal and, in some places, not yet introduced. Child work was by no means exploitative in pre-colonial Nigeria because it did not require children to toil

beyond their capacity. From eight years of age it became the avenue through which the society provided children with the skill and training required for adult roles... The Igbo looked upon it as a system of learning by doing and to the Yoruba it was an essential ingredient of self-discipline”²³. The foregoing has shown that while child labor was present in the traditional Nigerian cultures and societies, it lacked the commercial and capitalist intent which defines modern child labor practices. In traditional societies, children mostly worked with their parents as part of their socialization and education process. Uchendu’s assertion that “child work in colonial Nigeria was not exploitative” argues in terms of child work in the traditional sense. In relation to the British colonialists, child wage exploitation was, undoubtedly exploitative.

²³ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

CHAPTER THREE

THE COLONIAL ROOTS OF CHILD WAGE EXPLOITATION IN NIGERIA:

REVISITING SLAVERY, PAWNSHIP, AND FORCED LABOR

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, there have been increasing tempo in the campaign against child wage exploitation²⁴ around the world. Global index on children exposed to hazardous labor point especially to the developing world as the most vulnerable case studies.²⁵ An alarming percentage of children working for wages are found in Nigeria.²⁶ While scholars have devoted commendable attention to the high incidence of child wage exploitation in Nigeria and other parts of the developing world, an understudied aspect of scholarly research on child workers is the role of colonial governments in encouraging child wage exploitation in their former colonies. Although child work is not unknown in Africa before colonialism, social values were placed not on the commercialization of the labor of children but on using child labor as a tool for children's training, socialization, and preparation for adult life.

Colonial economic policies however, altered socio-economic institutions and brought untold hardship on the people. The Colonial Era in Nigeria was characterized by high taxations

²⁴ For emphasis sake, let me state again that, in this study, I use child labor not in the popular sense where it is used to refer to using children to make money, especially in often hazardous environments or conditions. Instead, I use child labor to refer to work culturally reserved for children in Africa, the aim of which is to serve as social instruments of child training, social integration, and preparation for adult life. This may involve both domestic labor and sometimes work done in business or industrial environments. It is important to note that in traditional African societies, work done in business environments were not essentially targeted at using children to generate more money, although the possibility of this cannot be entirely ruled out.

²⁵ See for instance, "Maina: Advocating Child Right on Sexual Abuse," *Daily Independent Newspaper*. <http://dailyindependent.com/2014/04/maina-advocating-child-rights-sexual-abuse/>

²⁶ See for instance, "Child Labor: A Threat to Future," *This Day Newspaper*, August 3, 2010.

and several harsh economic policies including forced labor, which did not spare children. The harshness of the tax policies for instance, led to the Aba Women's Riot of 1929. The burden brought about by high taxes and the need to meet individual and communal goals, therefore, compelled Nigerians to take child labor beyond the cultural practice of child training and social integration to wage exploitation as a strategy for raising more money. For instance, pawnship, the cultural practice of using human beings as collateral for loans, was moved beyond its traditional limits to using children as wage laborers with the aim of increasing family income to meet increasing financial demands introduced by the colonialists. This chapter examines the roles of colonial governments in Nigeria in encouraging the commercialization of child work in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

A Sketch on Child Labor in Precolonial Nigeria

The abolitionist campaign mounted by the British government in Nigeria, which was also the case in all her colonies in Africa often present the British as moralists and anti-slavery apologists. This was only on paper. Before the abolitionist movements, however, the colonial overlords had enriched British treasuries with the profits that accrued from the so called "illegitimate" traffic in human beings. Even during the campaign, the colonial government enacted legislations that sought to further entrench the institution. Also closely related to the institution of slavery was the widespread practice of pawnship among different African culture groups. The peoples that constitute what is now Nigeria were famous for this practice. What should, however, be clarified early enough is that these institutions in traditional African

societies were never commercialized (monetized) until Africa's contact with their European masters.

The centrality of agriculture as a major economic activity of the peoples of West Africa have received an interesting introduction by Professor A. G. Hopkins in his seminal study of West Africa.²⁷ Two important factors of production for a successful agricultural enterprise were land and labor. While land was in abundant supply, labor supply was scarce and, therefore, not always readily available. In response to the challenge posed by scarcity of labor supply, different approaches were adopted to ensure steady and efficient supply. The peoples of Africa, thus developed different kinds of dependency labor beside household or family labor. Falola and O'Hear observe that "the family constituted the primary unit of labor force. A family was an operative economic entity, which produced goods in cooperation, and shared the fruits of its labor".²⁸ The demand for labor thus encouraged the establishment of polygamous families. The idea behind this was that the larger the size of the family, the higher the labor force. This had the advantage of cost as household or family labor did not require wages. Falola and O'Hear further note that "a man organized his household—wife or wives and children—into a work force. No wages were paid but the man had to cater for his family members' basic needs. This system encouraged polygamy, for each additional wife and child increased the labor force".²⁹ Other forms of labor such as clientage, and cooperative work

²⁷ See A. G. Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa* (London: Longman 1973), 8-77.

²⁸ Toyin Falola and Ann O'Hear, "The Nigerian Economy in the Nineteenth century: An Overview," in Toyin Falola and Ann O'Hear, *Studies in the Nineteenth century Economic History of Nigeria* (Madison: African Studies Program, 1998), 2.

²⁹ Ibid.

groups, among others also existed. These kinds of labor were all engaged in by free-born members of the society.

Another distinctive class of dependency labor force also existed in traditional African societies. This was labor provided by domestic slaves and pawns. While scholars of slavery and labor history in Africa have given commendable attention to the trans-Atlantic slave trade, more work needs to be done on the value of slaves as an important source of labor in Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For this study, however, labor mobilization and its connection to children would be restricted to pawnship. Except in cases where children born by slave parents automatically became slaves themselves, child workers were often mobilized more frequently, through pawnship than was the case through domestic slavery. This chapter examines the commercialization of child labor during the Colonial Era following the enactment of forced labor legislations.

Economic inequality between the rich and the poor in Nigerian societies, as elsewhere around the world, resulted in a situation where people used themselves, or close relatives as security or collateral to borrow money, to meet their needs. The prevalence of pawnship—already defined above—according to Falola and Lovejoy, “appear to have had some correlation with poverty and the inability of families and individuals to secure the necessities of life”.³⁰ There were other reasons why people pawned themselves or their relatives. “Famine, disease, political insecurity, and economic miscalculations,” Falola and Lovejoy

³⁰ Toyin Falola and Paul Lovejoy, “Pawnship in Historical Perspective,” in Toyin Falola and Paul Lovejoy (eds.), *Pawnship in Africa: Debt Bondage in Historical Perspective* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 2. See also John Iliffe, *The African Poor: A History* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), where he highlights the relationship between pawnship and poverty.

continue, “were frequent causes of poverty and the need to borrow. It should be noted, however, that poverty was not always the cause of indebtedness. Sometimes merchants borrowed to promote their trade. Their expectation was to repay the loan sooner or later out of profits. People also borrowed to meet funeral expenses,³¹ ritual obligations and court fines”.³²

The value of pawns lay in the labor they provided for the creditor. Writing on the value of pawnship among the Nembe, in Nigeria’s Niger-Delta, Alagoa and Okorobia note that “pawns were acquired as a means of labor recruitment. For this purpose, male pawns were preferred. Such economic use of male pawns is best envisaged in the context of the overseas trade where the chiefs used labor to equip the large trade canoes to collect slaves or palm oil from producing centers in the hinterland and transport these goods to the European ships on the coast. Some pawns were used on the plantations of the fresh water delta to collect forest products. The male pawns and slaves also served as the manpower for the war canoes that protected the trade routes. They reinforced the strength of the House in the internal political contests as well”.³³

Writing about the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria, Falola observes as follows: “although there were other methods of raising money, pawnship was the most widespread,

³¹ It should be noted that many African culture groups pay close attention to fulfilling the funeral obligations of deceased relations. The common belief is that inadequate burial ceremony for departed family members hindered their journey into the spirit world, which in certain situations brought untold consequences for the family. For details of traditional burial practices among the Onitsha of Eastern Nigeria, see Chukwuemeka Agbo and Egodi Uchendu, “Continuity and Change in the Traditional Burial Culture of Postcolonial Onitsha, Anambra State” *Nigerian Heritage: Journal of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments*, Vol. 20, (2014), 9-25.

³² Falola and Lovejoy, “Pawnship in Historical Perspective,” 2.

³³ Ebiegberi J. Alagoa and Atei M. Okorobia, “Pawnship in Nembe, Niger Delta,” in Falola and Lovejoy, *Pawnship in Africa*, 77

mainly because it was the best investment for a creditor who not only collected back his money in the final analysis but who benefited from cheap labor in the meantime”.³⁴ It was to this institution that several child pawns were subjected by either their parents or guardians. What should, however, be noted is that child pawning (and even pawnship generally) was only a last resort for the debtor or intended borrower. Except in cases where parents pawned their children to skilled workers as apprentices to afford them the opportunity to learn the skills of their masters in return for their labor, child pawning was not always embraced. The conditions under which individuals (whether children or adults) were pawned were also closely regulated. Thus pawns, who in most cases were free-born members of the society, were not subjected to harsh conditions. This was both legal and psychological. Debtors pawned themselves in most cases to their close relatives. Also, the creditor ensured the satisfaction of his pawns, a strategy targeted at reducing the incidence of revolt or escape and maximum commitment to work.³⁵

Colonial Economic Policies: The Root of Child Wage Exploitation in Nigeria

Colonial economic policies forced child pawnship out of its cultural limits to commercialized labor. Pressures from the drastic economic realities that accompanied the abolition campaign, high taxes and unfavorable economic policies by the colonial government, communal responsibilities and expectations, as well as individual goals were factors responsible for the monetization of child labor in colonial Nigeria. Besides high taxes

³⁴ Toyin Falola, “Pawnship in Colonial Southwetsrn Nigeria,” in Toyin Falola and Paul Lovejoy, *Pawnship in Africa*, 247.

³⁵ See for instance, Felicia Ekejiuba, “Pawnship in Igboland,” in Falola and Lovejoy, *Pawnship in Africa*, 83-104.

and harsh economic policies by the colonial government the other factors were present in precolonial Nigerian societies. Interestingly, they did not lead to the commercialization of child labor. But the dawn of colonialism altered the pre-existing situation. Quoting Denton, a colonial officer in Nigeria, Falola observes: “the imposition of colonial rule provided the opportunity for pawnship to spread. Pawnship became common among the Ijebu following the British conquest”.³⁶ The decline of slavery is said to have encouraged the growth of pawnship, as many people sought the means to the labor shortage resulting from the decline of slavery.³⁷ The need for cash, for example, to meet the increasing cost of bride wealth and the imposition of colonial taxation also promoted pawnship.³⁸

Furthermore, child pawnship became commercialized because “the colonial state, despite occasional attacks on the institution, encouraged its continuity. In the first place, the demand for cash crops required farm labor and workers in the distributive network. Social and political changes affected access to labor and thereby made pawnship to thrive. The end of the wars and the imposition of colonial rule led to the decline of slavery. Access to labor became more and more dependent on market forces, notably the payment of wages, but the resort to older institutions such as the co-operative work group and pawnship were transitional forces in decline of slavery”.³⁹ While parents resorted to the older institution of pawnship to meet their need, the practice was altered to meet the need of the time. One

³⁶ Denton to Chamberlain (conf.), June 4 1898, C.O. 147/133 (Public Record Office), in Toyin Falola, “Pawnship in Colonial Southwestern Nigeria,” 246.

³⁷ Adeniyi Oroge, “Iwofa: An Historical Survey of the Yoruba Institution of Indenture,” *African Economic History*, 14 (1985), 92-6, in Falola Pawnship in “Colonial Southwestern Nigeria,” 246.

³⁸ Falola, Pawnship in “Colonial Southwestern Nigeria,” 246.

³⁹ Ibid.

outstanding outcome of such alterations was that parents and the older members of families and households began to look up to children as contributors to family income and burden bearers as well.

Another important colonial policy that encouraged the commercialization of child labor during the Colonial Era is forced labor. In this chapter, I borrow Ofonagoro's definition of forced labor. He defines forced labor as "labour exacted under conditions of compulsion with or without payment".⁴⁰ Ofonagoro observes that "whereas the abolition of slavery by the colonial government has been generously mentioned in the books and examined in articles, the simultaneous imposition of forced labour on Southern Nigeria peoples by the same Administration has generally received cursory treatment, or, in most cases, no serious scrutiny whatsoever".⁴¹ While Ofonagoro's chapter examines the contradictions between British abolitionist campaign and the enactment of forced labor legislations, this chapter explores the connection between British forced labor policies and the development and growth of child wage exploitation in Nigeria.

The dawn of the Twentieth Century saw the introduction of two forced labor laws in Nigeria—the Native House Rule Ordinance of 1901, and the Roads and Creeks Proclamation of 1903. Both laws "made labour for public purposes compulsory for all adult men between the ages of fifteen and fifty, and all adult women between the ages of fifteen and forty-five".⁴²

⁴⁰ Walter Ibekwe Ofonagoro, "An Aspect of British Colonial Policy in Southern Nigeria: The Problems of Forced labor and Slavery, 1895-1928," in Boniface Obichere (ed.), *Studies in Southern Nigerian History* (London: Frank Cass, 1982), 222.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 219.

⁴² *Ibid*, 222.

The Native House Rule Ordinance empowered chiefs to recruit forced labor. This was a design to enable the chiefs to use local police to secure the recapture of their runaway subjects—tended to re-impose slavery on both the free and unfree in the Delta area of Southern Nigeria.⁴³

Forced labor became a favored means of obtaining labor in the Southern Nigeria Protectorate especially under the administrations of Sir Ralph Moor and Sir Walter Egerton, High Commissioner and Governor of Southern Nigeria Protectorate respectively. Forced labor for them, was a source of cheap labor for portage, field operations, among others, which ensured that they kept the expenditure of the Southern Protectorate at the barest minimum.⁴⁴ Along with the Master and Servant Proclamation of 1901 and 1903, these laws, Ofonagoro observes, “were the statutory basis for the imposition of forced labor in Southern Nigeria”.⁴⁵ It is puzzling that the colonial government which claimed to be fighting slavery in Nigeria and her other colonies in Africa would encourage forced labor—a system akin to the institution of slavery. The only definition for this lay in her economic interest in Nigeria and the centrality of Nigeria’s indigenous labor force to meeting that goal. Even more puzzling is the inclusion of children in such labor category. Children as young as fifteen years old were subjected to hazardous work situations by the British. Ofonagoro also highlights instances of violation of socio-cultural institutions in Nigeria in pursuit of colonial forced labor policies.⁴⁶

⁴³ Ibid, 237.

⁴⁴ T. N. Tamuno, *The Evolution of the Nigerian State: The Southern Phase, 1898-1914* (London: Longman Publishers, 1972), 318.

⁴⁵ Ofonagoro, 237.

⁴⁶ See Ibid, 223.

Several arguments had been developed by Eurocentric apologists to justify the colonial imposition of forced labor on Nigerians, including the theory of the target worker. All these have long been laid to rest by scholars such as Hopkins and Ofonagoro.⁴⁷ Besides subjecting children to child wage exploitation, women were also targets of exploitation under forced labor laws. Commenting on forced labor in the Gold Coast and Nigeria, Asmis, the German consul at Boma observed: “this is the only example in English, French, or German native laws on the West Coast [of Africa], of women [sic] being used summoned to public work by a *special provision* [sic], although in German and French colonies women are often employed in helping to clear the roads.”⁴⁸ In pursuit of British economic interest in Nigeria, no distinction was made between children, women, and other adults and the kind of work they did under colonial forced labor laws. Children were used as carriers and paddlers, in the construction of roads and railways and in the mines, to mention but a few.

Defending the imposition of forced labor on Nigerians, Percy Anderson, a British colonial official noted: “how is the administration to be carried out if we cannot go to the Head of a House and demand carriers and paddlers? How is the work of sanitation, roadmaking and clearing to be carried on if we cannot hold the Head of the house responsible for furnishing the necessary labor”.⁴⁹ Lugard also justified forced labor in Nigeria by arguing that it was necessary “where labour cannot otherwise be procured for public works of an essential and urgent nature”.⁵⁰ He further noted: “we reluctantly admit the necessity of

⁴⁷ See A. G. Hopkins, *An Economic History of Africa*, and Ofonagoro, cited above.

⁴⁸ W. Asmis, “Law and Policy Relating to the Natives of the Gold Coast and Nigeria,” part 2, *Journal of African Studies*, vol. 12, (1912-12), 159.

⁴⁹ CO/520/107, “Native House Rule Ordinance,” minutes by Percy Anderson, 18/12/1911.

⁵⁰ F. D. Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (London:, 1922), 410.

compulsory labour in certain cases, and we do not stigmatize as slavery such labour, when under all possible safeguards against the occurrence of abuses, it is employed for indispensable and recognized purposes of public utility”.⁵¹ Such “indispensable and recognized purposes” involved the use of children in these unhealthy environments. Colonial officials further argued that forced labor was a continuation of the power the colonial government inherited from the kings and chiefs to exact labor for public purposes from the people being the government in power.

Although the colonial government argued that the demand for labor for public projects was customary to Nigeria’s diverse culture groups, their interpretation is misleading. Except in situations where kings and chiefs used slaves and their pawns for labor, they did not exact compulsory labor from their citizens. Communal labor was, in fact, accepted traditional civic responsibility of every citizen, backed by customary law, accepted by the people, and it complemented the socio-political and economic structure of these societies. Secondly, labor was not commercialized. Instead, it was targeted at meeting everyone’s interest. Also, where children were permitted to contribute to social labor, they were restricted only to such tasks that supported their development and did not interfere with their capabilities as children. In his rebuttal of this argument, Ofonagoro contends that:

The application of Anglo-Saxon notions of public power to Southern Nigeria was as misguided as it was based on false assumptions born of ignorance. While the Yoruba monarchies, the Benin Kingdom, and other hierarchically structured societies may have had some form of labor services to their governments, and while the village republics of Eastern Nigeria did have traditional provisions for community labor, such work was not usually exacted by force. It was even more undesirable when

⁵¹ Ibid.

such exaction was being imposed by a foreign, unrecognized, occupying power. The entirely extraordinary character of the exactions was manifest in the universal unpopularity of the practice in both the monarchical and segmentary lineage communities of Southern Nigeria.⁵²

It is, therefore, ironic that the colonial government which claimed to be fighting slavery, introduced forced labor in her colonies under the guise of seeking public good. The sectors where forced labor were particularly exacted by the British in Nigeria have received an interesting analysis by Njoku, where he aptly branded British economic infrastructures of this period as “infrastructures of exploitation”.⁵³ The goal of which knew no distinction between children and adults. These unhealthy economic policies of exploitation thus introduced an orientation which did not only encourage the monetization of child labor, but also created a situation in which adults began to look up to children as contributors to family income and co-burden bearers in their families. Needless to say, that this disrupted the childhood experience of Nigerian children. Forced labor laws were imposed to protect British interest. Sir Ralph Moor, for instance, supported forced labor laws because “unless a system of forced labor etc, were maintained, trade would suffer, and Liverpool interests would be affected”.⁵⁴

⁵² Ofonagoro, 236.

⁵³ See Onwuka N. Njoku, *Economic History of Nigeria, 19th-21st Centuries* (Nsukka: Great AP Express Publishers, 2014, first published by Magent Publishers in 2001).

⁵⁴ CO/520/121, “Memorandum by F. D. Lugard on the Native House Rule Ordinance,” 20/05/1912.

CHAPTER FOUR

CHILD WAGE EXPLOITATION IN TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY NIGERIA

In 2006, the number of exploited child workers was put at fifteen million (15,000,000).⁵⁵ By 2013, the number of Nigerian children engaged in child wage exploitation averaged 28.8 per cent of the population below fifteen years.⁵⁶ A CNN world child labor index in 2013 featured Nigeria among the top ten worst countries for child wage exploitation.⁵⁷

Also, the result of the NOIPoll survey of 2013 shows that North-western Nigeria had the highest percentage of child wage exploitation with a whopping 83 percent of its children involved in child wage exploitation. The Southwest and Southeast had 81 percent and 80 percent respectively while the North-central had 19 percent. The most common type of works children did were street hawking (68 percent) and begging (31 percent).⁵⁸ By 2015, the following figures were returned for child wage exploitation in Nigeria; Northwest 35.8 percent, Northeast 24.9 percent, North-central 7.7 percent. In the south it was, Southwest 0.7 percent, South-south 2.4 percent and Southeast 0.4 percent.⁵⁹ The 2015 projection still kept the figure of children involved in wage exploitation at fifteen million. The estimated number of children from 0-14 years was 76,505,041 (male 39,151,304 and female 37,353,737). This

⁵⁵ "Wogu and Fight against Child Labor", *Daily Independence Newspaper*, August 28, 2014.

⁵⁶ "Poll Blames Child Labor on Poverty", *Vanguard Newspaper*, November 18, 2013.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ "Poll Blames Poverty for High Prevalence of Child Labor", *This Day Newspaper*, November 13, 2013.

⁵⁹ "North has Highest Number of Early Marriage in Nigeria", *Leadership Newspaper*, June 8, 2015.

represents 43.2 percent of the total population.⁶⁰ This is a clear indication of government's lack of initiative, care, concern and commitment to ending child wage exploitation in Nigeria.

A lot of factors are responsible for child wage exploitation in Nigeria in particular and other countries of the world generally. Many of the existing literatures on child wage exploitation in Nigeria pay more attention to reporting various cases of child wage exploitation in the country and accord little attention to an in-depth analysis of its causes. This chapter shifts attention away from this prevailing practice. It examines the prevalence of child wage exploitation in Nigeria in the light of its causes. A proper understanding of the causes of child wage exploitation is pertinent to eradicating the anomaly in order to give children the future they deserve. In the case of Nigeria (as in other parts of the world too), a community of factors encouraged the use of children in trading, begging, prostitution, child trafficking, forced labor, and cruel domestic service among others. These issues are discussed below.

Poverty ranked highest among the causes of child wage exploitation in Nigeria between 2000 and 2015. NOIPolls,⁶¹ in a 2013 special edition poll on child wage exploitation and slavery in Nigeria aimed at understanding the perception of Nigerians on the prevalence of child wage exploitation in the country as well as its causes and possible solutions, identified poverty as the primary cause of child wage exploitation in the country.⁶² Many Nigerians lived (and still live) in abject poverty. The situation served the interest of unscrupulous individuals

⁶⁰ "Are there Hiccups with the Draft Policy on Child Labor?", *Daily Independence Newspaper*, April 1, 2015.

⁶¹ NOIPolls is a country-specific polling service in the West African region, in technical partnership with Gallup (USA) to develop opinion research in Nigeria. It was named after Nigeria's immediate past Minister of Finance, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala. See http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/NOI_Poll

⁶² See *This Day Newspaper* of November 13, 2013 and *Vanguard Newspaper* of November 18, 2013.

who capitalized on the helplessness of many families to enlist their children with the promise of making life better for the child when they take them to the city. This claim is usually false because the cruel opposite of the good life is mostly always the case. The National Coordinator of WOTCLEF gives further insight on how poverty encouraged child wage exploitation in Nigeria. Speaking at a forum on child wage exploitation, she notes as follows: “I urge parents especially those in the rural areas not to give their children to anybody. People come with all sorts of promises like ‘I will take your child to Abuja [Abuja is Nigeria’s capital], I will send your child to school, I will do this and that and because of poverty parents will readily give out their children”.⁶³ One obvious outcome of this study is that child wage exploitation thrived more in urban centers than was the case in rural communities. Hence, urbanization and its busy lifestyle encouraged child wage exploitation in Nigeria. Also, this study shows that child wage exploitation constitutes a major challenge to the human development of exploited children.

While some of parents were lucky to have their children trained and well taken care of as promised when they eventually get to the city, many unfortunately had their children maltreated and heartlessly abused. In early November 2015, the Nigerian police arrested Jane-Glad Ugba, a medical doctor at the Federal Teaching Hospital, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, in Eastern Nigeria, for pouring boiling water on her sixteen-year old domestic servant, Chidiebere Nwanga. Chidiebere was accused of allegedly leaving the house door open and for

⁶³ *Vanguard Newspaper* of November 18, 2013.

burning the yam he was asked to cook. To punish him, the doctor emptied the pot of boiling yam and water on him.⁶⁴

Apart from parents releasing their children to live with either friends or relatives or, in some cases, with total strangers, mostly through the services of a middle person, poverty also informed the decision of many parents to succumb to child wage exploitation as a means of overcoming poverty. Writing on child wage exploitation in Nigeria in August 2010, Ebere Nwiro records that previously, children worked with their families, learning skills they would need as adults. But the situation changed with time. Poverty forced children to contribute to the survival of their families. Thus: “the money earned by child workers has become a significant part of the family income. One of the most heartbreaking reminders that we are a poor country is the inundation of children on our streets selling different items to passers-by. From Lagos to Benin, Kano to Enugu, children under the age of eighteen, through circumstances beyond their control, are left to fend for themselves, and often for their parents as well, through the money they make working on the streets”.⁶⁵

Two outstanding examples of the centrality of poverty to the persistence of child wage exploitation in Nigeria during this period were also reported in the *This Day* newspaper article. Abimbola, who was eleven years old in 2010, sold walnuts (ukpa or awusa). The newspaper article reports that she ran endlessly after buses amidst the ceaseless traffic along the Lasu-Isheri Road in Western Nigeria. Like many child workers, Abimbola took advantage of slow

⁶⁴ <http://www.nigeriadailynews.news/news/216460-what-doctor-did-to-16-yr-old-boy-in-ebonyi-will-shock-you-photo.html>

⁶⁵ Child Labor: A Threat to Future, *This Day* Newspaper, August 3, 2010.

traffic caused by a major road failure to hawk her wares and she worked until late in the night. Sharing a bit of her life in an interview, Abimbola stated that she attended school in the morning and used the evening to sell for her mother to help her raise money for her school fees.⁶⁶ Similarly, Morenike, the mother of eleven-year-old Bolu shared her own experience and why she decided to bring her children into her business. She said:

In my house, everybody has to work to eat. I have four children and my husband is dead. I am an ordinary trader, I sell roasted corn, walnuts and pears; tell me, how can I support my children with what I get from my small business? Only my last two kids are in school because I cannot afford to send the elder kids to secondary schools. Even if I have to send them, what will I send them with?⁶⁷

Abimbola's and Bolu's situations exemplify what many Nigerian families suffered and still experience in the country. On the Onitsha-Enugu Expressway (a major high way connecting Anambra and Enugu states in Eastern Nigeria), countless number of women, teenage boys and girls and children of various ages have turned the highway into their market stalls. A lot of them crowd the highway (especially at major bus stops or in slow traffic caused by bad road condition). They often run after moving vehicles either to sell their wares or to collect money for items already sold. It would be an understatement to say that they risked being knocked down by moving vehicles as that is a usual occurrence. Many of these child workers and at times their adult counterparts have lost their lives in the process. On November 11 2015, Naija.com, an online news agency, reported the death of a teenage boy who hawked snacks and beverage drinks in Edo State, Southern Nigeria. The boy was crushed

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

by a moving trailer on Sapele Road by Adesuwa Junction while running after another moving vehicle to collect his money from the passenger he had sold his items to.⁶⁸

Poverty and its connection to child wage exploitation is also the reason why Chidera joined her mother in her restaurant business. Her poor mother was a widow and did not have enough money to keep her and her elder sisters in school at the same time. I ran into Chidera one afternoon in her mother's shop in Abakaliki, where I stopped by with colleagues for lunch. While chatting with the teenage girl, I discovered that she had stopped going to school for a while and I requested to know her reason for taking such decision. Chidera told me that her mother was a widow and that her income could not support her and her two sisters concurrently. The family, therefore, decided that she should join her mother in her business and wait for her elder sisters to finish their studies before continuing hers. They were hopeful that when the elder sisters graduate, they would get employed and thus help in training Chidera and her younger siblings.⁶⁹ However, such hope must necessarily also be constricted by the awful employment realities in Nigeria. Situations like this always ended in a loss of interest in education by the victim, child marriage, or sexual exploitation in the hands of miscreants who initially may present themselves as friends.

The challenge of poverty was often connected with inability to pursue western education. Because of the high cost of western education in Nigeria, poor parents resorted to child wage exploitation as a means of raising money for the education of their children. In

⁶⁸ Trailer Crushes and kills Teenager in Edo, Naija.com news online, November 11, 2015. See also, <http://thenationonline.net/trailer-crushes-teenager-along-auchi-okene-highway/> for another incident on March 10, 2015, also in Edo State.

⁶⁹ Informal chat with Chidera in Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, Nigeria sometime in April, 2015.

extreme cases, parents completely abandoned the idea of sending their children to school to acquire western education and encouraged their children to learn a trade, craft or give them away to a businessman (who may be a relative or not) to serve him for an agreed period, after which the master was expected to give the servant some gifts of money and any other thing he wished to give, as settlement for his services. Mr. Ogochukwu, a businessman in Onitsha Main Market, in an interview narrated the case of Stephen, a young boy of about twelve years old, to me. Stephen who was given to his master as a servant, was lucky because his master decided to send him to school because of his tender age. But on Saturdays and during holidays, Stephen joined other servants in the market. Stephen's master told the other servants that he would withdraw Stephen from school whenever he felt he had become of age to join fully in the business. My interviewee also noted that with time, Stephen's interaction with people in the market began to leave negative impacts on him as he started showing signs of street behaviors and the use of dirty language.⁷⁰

The states of Northern Nigeria present clear examples of how parental socio-economic background was partly responsible for child wage exploitation. Odukoya points out that child begging in this part of the country “was not just pervasive, but institutionalized”.⁷¹ The most common system of child wage exploitation in Northern Nigeria was the *almajiri*. According to Odukoya,

The *almajiri* were children out in the care of *ulamas* (Islamic teachers) for purposes of obtaining Qu'ranic education. Parents were often too poor to pay for the cost of such education, and with no other way to provide for the

⁷⁰ Interview with Mr Ogochukwu in April 2013 while on field trip for another project.

⁷¹ Adelaja Odutola Odukoya, “Child Labor in Nigeria: Historical Perspective”, *Sub-Saharan Africa: Western Africa*, 2011, 234.

children's welfare, the ulamas used them as farm labor and child beggars in order to provide for the upkeep of both the ulamas and the children.⁷²

Ibanga notes that there is also a religious dimension to the prevalence of almajiri practice in Northern Nigeria. He records that children, some of whom are as young as three years old, are sent to the streets by their Islamic teachers to beg and do odd jobs as part of Islamic practice. They were expected to remit proceeds from their endeavors to their teachers. He states that both parents and teachers encourage the practice for religious reasons.⁷³ Beside the almajiri style of begging, some poor women resorted to using their children as baits to attract public sympathy and alms. *This Day* of February 9, 2010 reports that women carry their barely clothed young toddlers under the hot sun and in the biting cold, with the sole intention of using these children as begging tools to draw sympathy and thus be given some money.⁷⁴

Similarly, the poor economic situation of the country and the continuously alarming increase of corruption in both public and private sectors also encouraged child wage exploitation in Nigeria. Corruption has been the major cause of underdevelopment in Africa. Uchendu and Agbo have shown that “public sector corruption reinforces private sector corruption in Nigeria”.⁷⁵ Nigeria's independence was greeted with great fanfare and a high sense of optimism. But as Njoku has shown, the peoples' expectation was cut short by corruption. His succinct description of the impact of corruption in Nigeria clearly illustrates

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Francis Ibanga, 59-60.

⁷⁴ “Child Labor: The Silent Evil in our Midst”, *This Day Newspaper*, February 9, 2010.

⁷⁵ Egodi Uchendu and Chukwuemeka Agbo, “A Study of Profit and Profitmaking among Onitsha Market Traders”, *Journal of Third World Studies*, vol. XXXII, No. 2, (Fall 2015), 219-239

the helplessness of the people and provides a window for us to understand the connection between corruption and child wage exploitation. He notes as follows:

On October 1 1960, Nigerians regained control of their destiny, including abundant human and natural resources. Expectations of a new era of prosperity and abundance ran high, and the economic prospects, buoyed by the discovery of crude oil, were most inviting, if not tantalizing. But the political leaders hastily blighted the prospects through lack of planning, prodigal financial indiscretion and unbridled corruption. In the process, the leaders (the military and civilian alike) pushed the populace into a state of abject penury, amidst plenty. Colonial exploitation had given way to indigenous exploitation in which a tiny minority has all but privatized the common wealth.⁷⁶

Corruption resulted in unemployment, inflation, brain drain, and poverty. It forced many into begging, armed robbery and countless other social vices. An anonymous interviewee reported that he was a university graduate but because he could not secure a meaningful job to do, he went into trading. His line of business was compact disk and musical equipments. He reported that the worst form of corruption they faced was piracy. Interestingly, this interviewee said that he did not blame anybody who indulged in piracy because the situation in the country was so bad and people needed to survive.⁷⁷

Public sector corruption as it relates to child wage exploitation is mostly evident in government's insensitivity and lack of concern and commitment to ending the scourge of child wage exploitation in the country. Nigeria's Federal Government enacted the Child Rights Act in 2003. But for different reasons the state assemblies of some states did not adopt the

⁷⁶ Onwuka Njoku, *Economic History of Nigeria, 19th-21st Centuries*, xii.

⁷⁷ Anonymous interview with a male trader in September 2012 at Iweka Road, Onitsha, Nigeria.

law in their different states for many years. Even in states where the Act was promptly adopted, child wage exploitation persisted and the number of child workers surged.

CHAPTER FIVE

NIGERIAN LEADERSHIP AND THE LEGAL INSTRUMENTS ON CHILD WAGE EXPLOITATION

Many Nigerians have decried government's inability to implement its laws for the progress of the country. Beside the Child Rights Act, Nigeria's leadership developed other initiatives and laws against child wage exploitation. These include, the National Joint Task Force for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse and Violence against Children,⁷⁸ Child and Young Persons Act 1933, and Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act (2003).⁷⁹ This chapter will show that the problem in Nigeria is not with making laws but implementing them. It was in line with this that Chinelo Egbuonu notes that "beyond the enactment of laws, the Federal Government appears unwilling to do more to stop child labor in Nigeria".⁸⁰ The wife of Nigeria's former Vice President and founder of WOTCLEF, Mrs Amina Titi Abubakar, at a policy dialogue on early marriage in Nigeria noted that Northern Nigeria has the highest number of child marriages. The pervasiveness of child marriage in Northern Nigeria is hinged on the belief that it could reduce promiscuity. In her speech, she reported that twenty percent of the girls married at fifteen years old while forty percent married between eighteen and twenty-two. In Nigeria's Northwest, forty-eight percent of the girls married at fifteen and seventy-eight percent married between eighteen and twenty-three. She noted that although government had come up with laws to check the

⁷⁸ Maina: Advocating Child Rights on Sexual Abuse", *Daily Independence* Newspaper, April 22, 2014.

⁷⁹ "Child Labor: The Silent Evil in Our Midst", *This Day* Newspaper, February 9, 2010.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

anomaly, it was not enough that a law had been put in place, but the enforcement of the law had to be taken seriously.⁸¹

At the inauguration of the National Joint Task Force for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse and Violence against Children, Mrs Olukemi Adeyeye, the Lagos Coordinator of the Association of Orphans and Vulnerable Children NGOs in Nigeria, said: “it’s not a bad idea, but I hope it will not go down the drain like other projects in the past in this country. We make so much noise on a project in this country but do we get result?”⁸² A more pathetic example was revealed in the report by the *Leadership* newspaper of June 2012. Ruth Haruna, the Program Officer of WOTCLEF, at a rally organized by the organization to create awareness against child trafficking, abuse and labor, said among other things: “the Child Rights Act was enacted in 2003, but as we speak, only twenty-four (out of Nigeria’s thirty-six) states have domesticated it. In Nigeria, you have a lot of legislation, but enforcement and implementation are the problem”.⁸³

Also speaking at the rally, the National Coordinator of the organization, Veronica Umaru, blamed increasing cases of child abuse on poverty, greed, and lack of government seriousness to put an end to the menace.⁸⁴ Furthermore, in August 2014, Nigeria’s Federal Government came up with yet another plan, the launching of the National Policy and National Action Plan, purportedly aimed at facilitating synergy and effective co-ordination of interventions aimed at eliminating child wage exploitation in the country. Speaking to

⁸¹ “North has Highest Number of Early Marriage in Nigeria”, *Leadership* Newspaper, June 8, 2015.

⁸² Maina: “Advocating Child Rights on Sexual Abuse”, *Daily Independence* Newspaper, April 22, 2014.

⁸³ “Children’s Rape on the Increase: WOTCLEF”, *Leadership* Newspaper, June 3, 2012.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

newsmen at the occasion, Mrs Adeyeye was reported as saying; “I don’t know how government will implement it. I don’t believe in all these Nigerian laws because they are made for certain people while others go scot-free”.⁸⁵

It should be noted that the National Action Plan was approved by Nigeria’s Federal Executive Council in September 2013 and launched one year after in August 2014.⁸⁶ The wide gap between the date it was approved and its formal launch is another indicator of government’s level of seriousness and commitment to eradicating child wage exploitation in Nigeria. At the 2014 Annual Congress of the Historical Society of Nigeria, Prof. Yakubu Ochefu, one of the delegates to Nigeria’s 2014 National Conference, observed that if government had implemented twenty percent of all the recommendations from the past national conferences since the 1970s, Nigeria would have been a much different place.⁸⁷ Mrs Adeyeye’s statement clearly shows that corruption, government’s insensitivity, lack of commitment, and care for the citizens resulted in a complete loss of interest in the country’s leadership and lack of confidence in its government by Nigerian citizens.

Lastly, the editorial report in the *Leadership* of May 27 (Children’s Day) 2013, states in very clear terms the unfortunate lack of visionary leadership which has continued to bedeviled Nigeria.

It goes without saying that Nigerian leaders only mouth what they do not mean and “celebrate” the Day (Children’s Day) as a routine ritual without caring what its essence means to the ordinary Nigerian child, manifesting in form of

⁸⁵ “Wogu and the Fight against Corruption” *Daily Independence* Newspaper, August 28, 2014.

⁸⁶ “FG Launches National Policy Action Plan on Child Labor”, *Leadership* Newspaper, August 31, 2014.

⁸⁷ Prof. Yakubu Ochefu, made this observation at the 58th and 59th Annual Congress of the Historical Society of Nigeria, held at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, in September 2014.

maltreatment of children, sexual harassment, denial of education (western education), child labor, intimidation and molestation, physical assault, neglect, and child trafficking, among others. It is incomprehensible why our various governments continue to pay lip service to the issue of the Convention on the Child and the domestication through the 54-article Child's Right Act. The evil perpetrated against the child continues to be on the rise. Indeed, the Nigerian child has no right, only abuses".⁸⁸

In the private sector, child wage exploitation mostly takes the form of child trafficking, baby factories and forced prostitution. Those who engaged in these nefarious acts capitalized on the poor economic condition of the country and saw child wage exploitation as a way of getting by. *Korea Times* of May 2013 reports the uncovering of a baby factory⁸⁹ in Imo State, Southeastern Nigeria where the police rescued seventeen pregnant teenage girls and eleven babies. The condition of these teenage girls was particularly disturbing. The girls, who were placed under house arrest by their captors testified to being fed only once a day and that they were all impregnated by a twenty-three year old man.⁹⁰

A 2011 investigation by the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) revealed that babies were sold for up to six thousand four hundred dollars each (\$6,400) each.⁹¹ Also in 2005, the police in Lagos State, Southwestern Nigeria announced the rescue of over one hundred children from child traffickers within three days. This included the discovery of sixty-four children in a frozen food truck (cooling van).⁹² The editorial in the *Vanguard* of April 24, 2014, focused on the importance of ending baby factories in Nigeria. The

⁸⁸ "Give Children's Day a Meaning", *Leadership Newspaper*, May 27, 2013.

⁸⁹ Baby factories are illegal procreation centers where human traffickers housed victims of child wage exploitation and force them to have sex with men for the purpose of getting them pregnant and selling their babies to either couples who are unable to have children biologically or social miscreants who need human body parts for ritual purposes.

⁹⁰ "Nigeria Baby Factory Raided in Imo State", *Korea Times Newspaper*, May 14, 2013.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² "Nigerian Police Rescue Dozens of Child Slaves in a Fish Truck", *National Post Newspaper*, March 8, 2005.

article reports that young girls who fell victims of unwanted pregnancy had their babies sold to couples who wished to adopt the children. Innocent young girls were also forced to have sex with men and depending on the sex of the baby, it was usually sold from five hundred thousand Naira (N500,000).⁹³ Male children were usually more expensive. The reason for this is simply traceable to the importance Africans place on the male child. Child trafficking in Nigeria within the period of this study took different forms and shapes.

To avoid the possible uncovering of their illicit businesses, child traffickers began to use different pseudo businesses or jobs as cover for their involvement in child trafficking. In April 2010, NAPTIP arrested a pastor with twenty-three girls whom he used for wage exploitation in Nasarawa State. The pastor, Bawa Madaki, was reported to always send the girls to a restaurant where they worked and remitted their earning to him. On his part, the pastor claimed that the parents of the girls brought the girls to him for deliverance.⁹⁴ In a related development, the police in Lagos State reported the arrest of ten suspects on the charges of running an orphanage for child trafficking. According to the report, the arrest was made during a raid on the Good Shepherd Orphanage in Okota, Lagos, where the staff were suspected of child trafficking and selling of babies.⁹⁵ Child trafficking also went beyond Nigeria's borders. In March 2005, fifty-two children from Togo were freed on Nigeria's western border with Benin by border police.⁹⁶ NAPTIP spokesperson, Arinze Orakwue, told *National Post* that "the Togolese children were probably destined for forced labor in Nigeria.

⁹³ "Ending the Baby Factory Menace", *Vanguard Newspaper*, April 24, 2014.

⁹⁴ "Cleric Arrested with 23 Teenagers in His Custody", *Daily Champion Newspaper*, April 4, 2010.

⁹⁵ *National Post Newspaper*, March 8, 2005.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

‘We have quarries in Nigeria which are prone to (using) child labor from Benin and Togo.’”⁹⁷

Two years earlier in 2003, five hundred children from Benin were rescued from granite quarries in Nigeria and repatriated.⁹⁸

Child wage exploitation in Nigeria was also encouraged by religious and cultural beliefs and practices. This was mostly the case in the Muslim-dominated Northern Nigeria and in some rural communities in the south. The keynote speaker at the policy dialogue of WOTCLEF in June 2015, Prof. Bem Angwe, noted that child marriage was being perpetuated in Nigeria under warped consideration of economic benefit, and religious and cultural misapplication.⁹⁹ I had earlier made reference to Mrs Titi Abubakar’s revealing speech regarding the high incidence of child wage exploitation in the country and its preponderance in Northern Nigeria.¹⁰⁰ I had also noted the respective marriages between fifty-four year old Emir Sanusi and eighteen year Sa’adatu and also between seventy-seven year old Oba Adeyemi and his sixteen year old wife. The Islamic faith supports child marriage, thereby giving Muslims the liberty to sexually exploit children, especially girls.

Akinwumi presents another revealing scenario in Nigeria’s politics where religious and cultural beliefs could undermine the interest of children. Nigeria submitted its first policy plan for the implementation of the Child Rights Convention to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child in 1996. Akinwumi notes that the committee recommended among other things that, “Nigeria should ensure the domestication of the Child Rights Convention as

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Leadership Newspaper*, June 8, 2015.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

a prerequisite for its full implementation under Nigeria's law".¹⁰¹ A first bill on the child's right had been deliberated upon earlier in 1993 but could not be passed into law by the military government because of opposition from religious groups and traditionalist. A special committee was afterwards set up to harmonize the bill with Nigerian religious and customary beliefs. These efforts resulted in the 2002 bill, which sought to enunciate the rights and responsibilities of Nigerian children as well as a renewed system of juvenile justice administration. This bill was again rejected in October of that year on the grounds of having contents that were contrary to Islamic values, traditions, and culture. The main objection was targeted at opposing the proposal of enforcing eighteen years as the minimum age for marriage.¹⁰²

The anonymous interview cited earlier and the results of other studies did not only point to corruption as the bane of development and progress in Nigeria but also to unemployment, lack of social security and any plan for the good of Nigeria's teeming youths and children. The high rate of unemployment was (and still is) particularly pathetic. My interviewee was unequivocal as he shared his opinion on Nigeria's unemployment rate and government failure with me:

Our government is not helping citizens, especially graduates. I am a graduate, but I have no job. At the end of the day, this is where I found myself selling musical tapes and CDs. From here I try to make ends meet. There are others who are done with schooling, but there is no job for them. To such people there is no government and there is no national plan for the youths. Therefore, most of them have no choice but to engage their educated minds in piracy as a way

¹⁰¹ Olayinka Silas Akinwumi, "Legal Impediments on the Practical Implementation of the Child Rights Act 2003", *International Journal of Legal Information*, 2009, 37, no 3, 385.

¹⁰² *Ibid.* See also, <http://www.irinews.org/print.asp?ReportJD=30878> and http://www.unicef.org/WCRO_Nigeria_Factsheets.at.p.2.

of survival at least. I am not saying piracy is good because it also affects me. But, at the same time, I am not eager to criticize people for piracy because I am not the one to feed them or take care of them...¹⁰³

While this interviewee linked the high rate of unemployment to piracy, which was the major challenge traders in the music industry faced, unemployment was also responsible for the persistence and the alarming increase of child wage exploitation in Nigeria since the dawn of this century.

Reporting the proceedings of the 2014 International Labor Conference held in Geneva, the *Sun* newspaper notes that Nigeria is among the developing countries that do not have a well-defined social protection, especially for the unemployed, the aged and children.¹⁰⁴ During an interview with the newspaper correspondence, Munir Abubakar, the Managing Director of the Nigeria Social Insurance Trust Fund claimed that Nigeria should toe the line of the developed societies by developing its social protection scheme.¹⁰⁵ Like several other promises by the government and its agencies, developing a policy plan for Nigerian youths and children and a social security for all its citizens remained unaccomplished. With the over one hundred and fifty universities in the country turning out graduates every year, unemployment continued to surge. The more Nigerians hoped to see a better tomorrow, the more it seemed to elude them. In a desperate desire to survive and make ends meet, many resorted to different forms of child wage exploitation as their survival strategy.

¹⁰³ Anonymous interview cited.

¹⁰⁴ "Nigeria's Pioneering Social Protection in Africa: Munir Abubakar, NSITF MD", *The Sun* Newspaper, June 21, 2014.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

Child Wage Exploitation, Insecurity and Violence in Nigeria

In the last decade, Nigeria has unfortunately joined the growing number of nations around the world with mounting challenges of insecurity and violence. Nigeria's Northeast became a major theatre of terrorist attacks, which led to the loss of thousands of human lives and invaluable assets amounting to millions of dollars. There is no doubting the fact that the various problems examined above and child wage exploitation are in part responsible for the growing spate of insecurity and violence in the country. Although the Boko Haram terrorist attacks have been accepted to be more religiously informed than anything else, what explanation do we have for the high rate of armed robbery and kidnapping, that ravaged Nigeria in the last decade? This section will briefly highlight the connection between child wage exploitation, insecurity, and violence in Nigeria.

The editorial report on child wage exploitation in the *Daily Trust* of January 2014, notes that “those who are not directly affected by child wage exploitation may find it very easy to ignore the issue”. However, beside its moral implications, the editorial also highlights its economic consequences. It notes that most of the children engaged in child wage exploitation missed the opportunity of attending western schools. Their inability to obtain diplomas and degrees resulted in high rate of poverty and increasing number of school drop outs, which can lead to inter-generational poverty through succession of work without western education. It states:

With the high rate of crime in our society, it is obvious that school drop outs who are unemployed and do not contribute to the growth of the economy in any way are those

that are vulnerable to be lured into devious behavior that is slowly destroying the market economy of affected states.¹⁰⁶

Also, the *Daily Independence* of April 2015 details the connection between child wage exploitation, insecurity, and violence. Here the author is concerned about the uncertainty of the future of victims of child wage exploitation. It notes as follows:

The future of child hawkers, bus conductors or scavengers is uncertain. The 'lucky' ones graduate into touts, laborers, bus drivers or petty traders while the 'not-so-lucky' ones become drug peddlers, prostitutes, thugs, pimps, armed robbers and social misfits. Others struggle through life to have a better future, making life so difficult for them and sometimes making them become so hardened in life. Many die as a result of molestation and other abuses.¹⁰⁷

Child wage labor also resulted in several cases of communal clashes. A good example is the reoccurring clashes between Fulani cattle rearers and their host communities all over Nigeria. The Fulani in Northern Nigeria were notable for cattle rearing. They introduced their children into this business at a very early age, sometimes as early as five years. These children wandered with the cattle for several kilometers in search of pasture. Most often, they went beyond their communal boundaries, settling in other regions where they mostly had problems with the indigenous people because they allowed their livestock into the people's farms leading to the destruction of their crops. The outcome was usually eruption of violent attacks on both sides leading to the loss of lives and property and social insecurity. Benue, Delta, and Nasarawa states were major theatres of communal clashes between the Fulani and their hosts in the last decade. One of the most recent incidents took place in Nimbo community in Uzo

¹⁰⁶ "Is Child Labor Good for our Economy?" *Daily Trust* Newspaper, January 31, 2014.

¹⁰⁷ "Are there Hiccups with the Draft Policy on Child Labor?", *Daily Independence* Newspapers, April 1, 2015.

Uwani Local Government Area of Enugu State in Eastern Nigeria in April 2016, when Fulani herdsmen invaded the community and slaughtered hundreds of its indigenes.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that child wage exploitation is not peculiar to Africa and the rest of the developing world. Instead, it is a global phenomenon even though certain geographical or social differences exist. For instance, the exploitation of cheap child labor in Britain during the Industrial Revolution took the form of forced labor in colonial Nigeria. In the United States, Ibanga observes that working children kept their parents from being dependent on public charity. In Nigeria, working children did not only keep their parents from being dependent on public charity, the money they brought into their families help in assuaging the unpleasant circumstances resulting from the economic realities in the country.

This study has also argued that in discussing child wage exploitation in Africa, careful attention should be given to understanding the traditional African practice of child labor as a tool for children's education, domestic training and socialization. Thus scholars should be careful not to interpret child work in Africa as child wage exploitation. This is particularly important as the need arises to check the growing intellectual colonization of Africa by western institutions.

While child labor was in practice among Nigeria's ethnic groups before European contact with the country, the aim was not to commercialize it but to use it as one of the societies' tool for child training/upbringing, socialization and preparation for adult life. British colonial economic interests imposed high taxes thereby forcing adults to take local institutions beyond their traditional boundaries. One of such institutions was pawnship—the practice of

using one's self or close relation as collateral for loans in return of which the creditor enjoyed the debtor's labor as interest on his loan until his money was repaid.

Although pawnship was an accepted social practice, it was, however, a last resort. During the Colonial Era, however, the growing economic harshness of the period pushed the people to devise several ways of overcoming the burdens placed on them by the colonial masters. One way for them was the monetization of the labor of their children. Thus, children began to take active parts in raising money for their families. The once social practice of child protection and training with labor equal to his/her capability was gradually eroded by the desire to make more money. This continued into the Twenty-first Century with more consequences for both children and the society.

Furthermore, the demand for indigenous labor culminated in the introduction of forced labor laws, which compelled people including children to work. The justifications put forward by the British for this policy have been challenged in this work. Contrary to alleged reasons for imposing forced labor, the policy does not in any way conform to traditional practices among the peoples of Nigeria before their contact with the British.

It has also been established in this study that a proper understanding of the pervasiveness and persistence of child wage exploitation in Nigeria since the beginning of the twenty-first century requires an examination of its causes especially the economic situation of Nigeria and the hardship faced by the country's citizens. The major challenges were poverty and public sector corruption which informed and reinforced corruption in the private sector. If child

wage exploitation would be eradicated in Nigeria in the near future, these two menaces must be adequately dealt with.

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